

Authentic Partnerships with Families and Caregivers to Support Literacy Learning

Oregon Department of Education

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbkbS-FM_5w

Angelica Cruz: Hi everyone. Welcome. Thank you so much for being here today. We're just going to give folks a few more seconds to come in from the waiting room and get connected to audio, and then we will jump in and get started. All right, it looks like we are all connected. Well, welcome everyone. Thank you so much for joining us today to learn more about how to create authentic partnerships with families and caregivers to support early literacy learning. I'm Angelica Cruz. I'm the Director of Literacy at the Oregon Department of Education, and I'm joined today by colleagues from WestEd as well as Oregon teachers and leaders to present this webinar. We are all very grateful that you're joining us today and we hope you find this webinar informative for your practice.

We would love to see who's joining us today. If you could add in the chat your name and your role, and if you could also share a time in your own childhood experience when you felt a strong sense of belonging and inclusion related to literacy. So this might've been something during the school day, something at an evening event, maybe an interaction with a teacher, or just any time in your schooling experience when you felt a personal connection or a strong sense of inclusion as it related to literacy. And as folks get that entered into the chat, we will move on to our objectives. Alright, so today we have two key objective, excuse me, objectives for our webinar. Our first goal is that you'll learn about how Oregon's Early Literacy Framework can serve as a resource to engage families and caregivers in authentic ways as partners in literacy learning. And our second goal is for you to explore ideas and strategies to support literacy learning through collaborative partnership with families and caregivers. Also, we'll add a link to the slides in the chat for anybody who would like to follow along on their own as we go through our slide deck today.

Our agenda is listed on this slide here. We've just completed our welcome and a little community building in the chat. Next, we'll provide an introduction to Oregon's Early Literacy Framework, and then we'll spend the majority of our time together reviewing key ideas for supporting authentic partnership between school and home in early literacy, as well as hear from educators in the field about how they partner with families and caregivers. We'll end with a brief reflection and a closing. Alright, moving on to our overview of the framework. The purpose of a statewide literacy framework is to help build momentum and capacity for making literacy instruction stronger in Oregon so that all of our students leave elementary school reading and writing with grade level fluency, with confidence and with competence in at least one language. It also serves as a mentor text to build coherence, common ground and clarity across the state for the vision of literacy instruction so that we can all work together to improve literacy outcomes for every Oregon student. Finally, the Framework aligns with the governor's vision for improving literacy outcomes across our state with an intentional emphasis on how the Framework elevates the literacy and language assets that diverse learners bring. This Framework is intended to be actionable for districts and building leaders, useful for teachers and informative for families and communities.

There are seven guiding principles that guided the development of the Early Literacy Framework. If we go to the next slide here, and these serve as the core values within each section. The first principle is that early literacy begins at birth. Our second is that children are full of literary promise. Families and communities play an important role, which we'll be talking more in depth about today, and multilingualism benefits everyone. We also know that foundational skills matter, teacher knowledge and practice are critical and every student can be taught to read and write. Our next slide gives a brief overview of the sections of the framework. So as you can see here, the framework is divided into eight sections. Sections 1 through 3 are all about setting the conditions for learning, and these sections lean into the guiding principles that literacy begins at birth and that families and communities are critical partners.

Sections 4 and 5 provide common language for the science of reading, what can be learned from the convergence of research on literacy in the brain, and the importance of explicit, systematic instruction of foundational skills. Finally, Sections 6 through 8 cover an array of important topics including the application of the foundational skills to writing and reading comprehension and the role of vocabulary and background knowledge, the role of core instruction and assessment, and how to support students experiencing disabilities, including dyslexia, students who are multilingual and our talented and gifted students. So today we'll be taking a deep dive into Section 2, focusing on how to authentically engage families and caregivers as partners in literacy learning. And now I'll turn it over to my WestEd colleague, Alicia, to get us started on this topic.

Alicia Okpareke: Thank you, Angelica, for your welcome and introduction. Good afternoon. I'm delighted to be here with all of you and I'm appreciative of the time you're taking to join us. My name is Alicia Okpareke. I'm a Senior Research Associate here at WestEd. I have worked in education for 20 years, beginning as an elementary school teacher, then as a professor to pre-service teachers, and now as a researcher with a focus on partnerships, including those between schools, communities and families. So our topic today is near and dear to me. Next slide please. I'd like to begin with a few reflective prompts and we are going to create a word cloud with our responses. You can use your phone or computer to access with [menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and the company code or the QR code here on the screen. Our first prompt is: what one word would you use to describe an ideal family-school partnership?

Okay, a few words already. Collaboration, collaborative, proactive. Two-way. Trust. A lot of similarities between the words we're seeing. Love, happy, positive. Collaborative is still our top word. Let's give it a few more seconds. Transparency, I see now too, and respect and listening. Wow, a lot of great responses. So I see a lot of things that have to do with collaboration, respect, working together, things that make us happy or feel joyful. Great. Let's go to the next one. We have one more. Now, take a moment to consider how you describe the current state of family-school partnerships for your school or your district. Once again, using one word.

So the words are a little bit different. Mediocre, one-sided or one-way, distrustful. Email, surface-level communication. Improving. One way is our largest word so far. I see improving and work in progress. Great. So a lot of things that hint at room for improvement or areas that maybe we want to be better at. Yeah, I see informative too and communication. So some really positive aspects as well. Thanks everyone for participating. I appreciate your participation. Next, I'd like to preview three key ideas for family and caregiver partnerships that we're going to discuss in our remaining time. They're listed here

on the slide and I will read them aloud too. First, collaboration with families and communities as learning partners is vital for student literacy development at school. Second, productive collaboration with family caregivers is based on recognizing, valuing, honoring and supporting home and community language and literacy assets and practices. And then thirdly, there's no one size fits all for authentic family/caregiver partnerships.

So, let's begin by talking about the importance of collaboration. On the next slide, we're going to think about positive, affirming partnerships between families, caregivers, and schools, and how they can further enhance students' literacy, growth, and a love for reading, writing, and communicating. This type of collaboration co-supports students. It offers learning within and across contexts, including home, community spaces, and school. These learning experiences can build upon and enhance each other. Integrating home language and linguistic and literacy practices into the classroom is important to foster student belonging and for students to further develop their language and their literacy skills. Funds of knowledge and identity is a concept that helps make more clear and explicit the literacy assets of students that they bring to the classroom. It's knowledge, behaviors, practices, routines and interests that families and cultural groups have and share. On the next slide, you will see two quotes that define funds of knowledge and identity.

The first quote says, "Historically accumulated, culturally developed and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person's self-definition, self, self-expression, and self-understanding. This reinforces that funds are passed down and they have history behind them. They're a part of family's culture and they are shared socially in a range of ways. The other key aspect of this quote is how funds are intricately linked to how we see, express and understand ourselves. The second quote says, "Knowledge and resources that come from their background - ethnic, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic and/or educational." All families have a wealth of knowledge and resources that come from their backgrounds. Family, community, and peers share, teach and model these funds in a variety of ways. This can include providing knowledge, skills, artifacts, ways of being, doing and communicating. On the next slide I'm going to share a few examples of funds. Funds can be more concrete like the languages spoken at home or the knowledge of important celebration that the families engage in.

It can also be related to routines or practices or rules that the family has around, for example, food and cooking. What's cooked, when it's cooked, for whom it's cooked. Things like caregiving - how do we take care of ourselves? How do we take care of others? And any other types of responsibilities. It can also be around things like interests that the family engages in and has knowledge of related to sports, music, nature, and hobbies. This is just kind of a beginning list to get you thinking. Let's take a few minutes to identify funds that you have. Here's a list of some categories of funds to consider.

We can go back a slide. It includes the geographical, the practical, the cultural, social, institutional, experiential. Feel free over the next minute or two to share a few of your own funds in the chat. As you think about that, let's go to the next slide and think about some important questions to ask ourselves then about the use of funds of knowledge and identity. First, how do you identify your students' funds of knowledge? Some ways that teachers have done this are through in-class and take-home assignments, activities or forms that ask students to share about themselves. Communication with families can include this as well - the phone calls, emails, video calls or even in-person events or interactions that ask families to share about themselves. Another more intensive kind of route that one

of my children's teachers actually used this year was offering to attend and support at an event that we felt comfortable inviting her to.

So it could have been sporting, arts, cultural, music, anything, but she was willing to come and experience it with us and for us to tell her about it. The second question, how do you integrate student funds in the classroom instruction and activities? And the sub-question, how do you ensure that you value and incorporate funds that are less familiar, familiar to you? Funds can be integrated in a lot of different ways. In kindergarten, I've seen teachers integrate and validate them in their imaginative play spaces in the classroom. You can also use read-alouds, centers or stations, book clubs or literature circles to incorporate funds. Inviting families or caregivers into your classroom physically or for video, recorded or synchronous to share knowledge and practices is another avenue. It's important to ensure that funds that are less familiar to you and are minoritized are valued and incorporated. Becoming aware of both your own funds and the funds of your students is one first step. As the last statement on this slide shares, funds of communities who have been historically and persistently marginalized are often less known to schools and their funds are often overlooked, especially as assets. Given how important funds of knowledge are, it is important to consider the ways you can ensure funds from minoritized communities and/or funds that differ from your own are valued and incorporated.

Now let's think about strategies for building partnerships. On the next slide, let's consider the following question. How does belonging feel? Go ahead and put these in the chat. Being seen and known. Thank you. Safe. Comfortable sharing. Validated and accepted. Your voice and ideas matter. Comfortable. Great, thank you. I would even add from mine, I thought about I feel warm, cared for, listened to, connected. So very similar to what we had in the chat. So one more question, how does othering feel? Go ahead and feel free to put this in the chat too. Discounted, left out.

Cold, unsafe, isolating, lonely. Thank you. I had similar thoughts. I had down, isolating, disconnected, sad, even deficient. The answers to these questions help us think about what we want to build with families and caregivers as well as what we'd like to prevent them from feeling. On the next slide, I want us to think about some things that are important for us to ask ourselves. What is essential for productive collaboration between families and schools? Working with the feelings of belonging that we thought about in the last slide, here's another key idea to consider. Productive collaboration needs to include recognition, value, honoring, and support of home and community language and literacy assets and practices. My colleagues Erin and Aiden will speak to this in more detail next in the presentation.

To this end, I'd like us to start thinking about the strategies that we use. On this next slide, I've listed four broad ideas: understanding and valuing what families are already doing at home to promote literacy, providing a variety of authentic options to engage with learning at school, holding listening sessions to engage families about their ideas for collaboration and giving families accessible opportunities to know what students are learning, including breaking down science of reading and school jargon into family-friendly terms. It's important to remember that no one size fits all and we should continually reflect and adapt to better serve the families and caregivers we work with. Next, Erin will talk a little bit more about the practices that we see and can do in schools and communities.

Erin Helgren: Thank you. My name is Erin and I am currently the Yoncalla Elementary School principal and the Yoncalla Preschool director and also wear the hat as the site liaison for the 10 year Children's

Institute Early Works project located here in Yoncalla. Next slide. Yoncalla is a small rural community in North Douglas County, a population of about 1,200 residents. 320 of those residents attend a school in the Yoncalla school district in two buildings. We have a Pre-K through sixth grade building and a seventh through eighth grade or seventh through 12th grade building. We have had the honor and pleasure of being the demonstration site for the Ford Family 10-year deep dive into really learning about rural equity and how to build community schools in rural communities. Our goal has been to support conditions for children and families to define and drive the success in school and in life. Next slide. In our community, we have spent a number of years really deeply understanding the core values that drive change and the three values that I'd like to share with you today are really grounding in the relational priority. Building relationships, strong, trusting relationships with families, is critical, honoring family and community collaboration and then really embedding a systems approach in and how we do our work not only in literacy but throughout a variety of domains. Next slide please.

So I wanted to share about cultivating trusting relationships and share our journey in Yoncalla. So 10 years ago when we entered into our project, families weren't traditionally asked how to serve them and what their community's strengths were. And so I think one of our priorities was to create opportunities for families and staff to authentically connect outside of what we would think of traditional ways like open houses, but really to embed strategies that we knew were grounded in relationships. For instance, our families do or our teachers do home visiting. So Pre-K through sixth grade, each teacher goes and visits families in their home. And it's not an opportunity for them to tell them how to be a better student or how to show up at school. It's really for us to embrace the strength and the expertise of the family and meeting the very, very specific needs of their child.

And so our questions that we ask families are grounded in: What are your hopes and dreams for your child? What does it look like at school for your child? How do we ensure that we are meeting your needs and your family's needs inside of our school building? How are we of service to you? We also do host grade-level dinners at the beginning of the year, and instead of having all families K-6 come into our building at one time, we have six different nights where families can come in and spend time just with their teachers and at this time is a time for them and their child to share their classroom. We take a family photo and we hang a family photo in our classroom during these grade-level family dinners. And then teachers will gently share some of the strategies that we're using in our classrooms to promote literacy, share strategies for accessing online support and just again, continue to build relationships with families.

And then this, we host a back-to-school community barbecue where we invite all families and all staff from administrators to support staff to custodial staff and teachers to come and sit together on our football field and have a welcome dinner. And again, there's not an agenda. It's not, let's talk about how to be a better parent so your child can be a better reader. It's about what do we need to know? How can you share us and how can you share your expertise in creating opportunities for us to best serve your child? Next slide, please.

The other key cornerstone for us is honoring our family and community collaboration. And so really, really truly grounding literacy strategies and family input and guidance. And I'd like to share a couple of examples. One of the things that we've learned from our families is that they had prioritized free, fun things to do with kids. And so we embedded literacy strategies and literacy education into things like Dr.

Seuss night and monthly read-ins where families and children can come and have meals together and they can share books in the context of the library or in our cafeteria. In our community, we happen to not have a library, so our families really rely on our school library as a resource to books. We knew that in our community that families had identified that sports is a huge part of our culture, and so we thought about ways of embedding not only competitive sports, but how do we embed reading into sports?

And so we were, during basketball season, we were meeting with students each week to track and log how many books they'd read during the week. And so we had a contest going to see which team could read the most books, and then we were able to waive fees and t-shirt fees for our families that participated in the book read-a-thon basketball piece. The other thing that we really feel is important is to really encourage community members and families to own their data. And so we share our data very transparently and with the hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of community-driven approaches and opportunities for us to support growth. And an example that I'd like to share is that what we've learned through interviewing and through focus groups and through home visiting is that many of our families themselves had limited access to literacy skills. And so we knew that families really wanted to be able to share books with students but may have felt some shame around their own access to reading. And so we actually trained families in dialogic reading and so how do we share books with families that may not find reading coming easily for them or sharing books an easy thing for them to do? And so again, really sharing data and understanding so you can build strategies around the assets in your communities and the priorities in your communities. Next slide.

The other piece that I want to touch on is really approaching literacy in a systems approach. And so in Yoncalla, we've shifted from thinking as families as volunteers, or families as people that are providing input or data, but really understanding that families are consultants in the work that we do. And so recognizing that without family input and without family voice that we can't really build a strong literacy framework or literacy approach, that we need their voice to do authentic work. We've really prioritized families as partners in decision-making. So everything from sitting on site councils and sitting and supporting collaboration with our parent leadership group and the school district to really consulting on them about information that we're sending out into the community, having families support us in planning events and dates. And I learned when I learned moved to Yoncalla that if you plan something on a Wednesday that most families will be at church on Wednesday and so we need to plan on a Tuesday and Thursday so that really families are partners and helping us decide how we go about doing the work.

Some other examples are really including families as partners in curriculum adoption. So we have adopted three different curriculums in the last four years and families have been active participants in our curriculum adoption. And so that means that they sit alongside staff, they learn about our different options, they look at our priorities for our community, and they take an active role in helping us to identify the curriculum that best reflects their community. We include families in literacy development through professional learning. And so we are not only teaching our staff around science of reading, but we're also ensuring that we're very, very mindful of creating opportunities for families to come in and learn from the experts that we're learning from. So we teach them about the different strategies, we teach them all of the things that we're teaching our teachers. Then really, one last thing I wanted to touch on was just really thinking about how we're decolonizing literacy data collection and really being

mindful about the unintended consequence of asking certain questions that may seem innocuous but can often cause shame amongst families.

And one of the things that we really rethought a few years ago was really asking families around the number of books that they had in their home and the unintended consequence of asking that question could be a perceived shame from families. And instead we really looked at what that data point was searching for. And that data point is about language acquisition and about having access to the vocabulary and to language. And so we're really thinking about how we're asking questions, about how they share literacy, how they story tell in their family, how they promote vocabulary, without creating the space for shame around literacy development. Next slide. And I'm going to hand it over to Aden. Thank you.

Aden Cador: Hi everyone. I'm so honored to be here. My name is Aden Cador. I am a fourth year kindergarten teacher at Kairos, PDX, a charter school in Portland Public School District. I'll be sharing about how I interconnect family relationships and partnerships into our literacy throughout the year because as you all know, kindergarten is that first step in schooling of elementary and it's just super important to have families interconnected. Next slide please. So at the beginning of the year, I hold just get-to-know-you conferences and it's just a chance for families to chat with me about any schema they have around literacy, any questions, anything that they may be curious about and how I can best support their student and them throughout the year. I find that in holding these meetings, it gives families a chance to understand that kindergarten, it's not going to be the same for every student, and I'm here to help them grow in that capacity of how to best support their student as well.

So just talking with families and seeing how I can really help them grow with their student is how we start the year. And then just weekly communication. I send out a weekly newsletter on Friday. In that newsletter I include everything we do in our literacy throughout the week, and I find that in those emails sometimes it can be daunting, but I really try to do what you can do at home. I understand that not every family has the same access at home. And so if we don't have access to technology, here's what you could draw or write out with your student at home, practicing writing down those letters. Just really foundational skills practice is something that I find is accessible for everyone. And then I share what we're doing inside the classroom. So taking pictures, documenting our writing, our reading, showing families, oh, that is what they're doing in school and how to replicate it at home, I find is a really huge access point for families that may be hesitant on how to start their work at home with their student as well.

And then in those weekly newsletters too, I'm always, always asking for feedback. What's working at home with your student? What's not working at home? What's amazing? I always want to hear the glows and the grows of how they're working at home with their student. And in those communications too, I always offer a chance for any type of questions that you have around literacy of, Hey, I have a question about this certain sound of a letter. My student at home is saying this, how do you do this? And so having just open communication, I find that is a super helpful tool for families. And then representation. Representation is super important as we all know, but it takes so many different avenues. There's a couple things that I love to do at the beginning of the year we start secret reader. Secret reader is something that every family can sign up for and it's a chance where we don't know who's going to come in that week, but a family member comes in, reads a story, and then gets to hang

out with us. Because it's at the end of the day, they get a chance to hang out with us and see how our story workshop, which I'll go more into in a second, how it works. I find that this is a great access point for families that have that flexibility in their schedule, but I also have other chances for families to come in for just celebrations of our literacy growth.

So in our ELA curriculum, we have a huge, we just finished it actually. We make our own weather stories. And in kindergarten, that's a huge push. They're doing a rough draft, they're doing a final draft, they're doing inventive spelling and it's such a big project. And so we invite all families in and it's called an authors' tea and not authors' tea. It's a chance for families to just hear how much their student has grown, see their reading, see how they can practice those skills at home and understand that not every student is going to be doing the same thing. And it's wonderful how much they grow throughout kindergarten as well. So representation isn't just in the stories that we have because representation is super important, but we also have our families come in different capacities of how they can make it. I also have reading buddies and the beautiful thing about Kairos PDX is that we have a lot of siblings and cousins that go to the same school as us.

So we have a chance for those partnerships with siblings and cousins to come and read with us and just getting a chance to share in our day with how much we're growing in our literacy as well. Next slide, please. Oh, actually, no, this is perfect. Thank you. So Story Workshop is a huge part of kindergarten for us. It's our chance to practice all our foundational skills that we have in our curriculum in our own way. So in the beginning of the year, we tell stories about our families. In this storytelling, we start with a lot of sensory trays. So there's some sand trays, there's water colors, there's things like that. But we're telling stories about what we like to do outside of school. I find that when we're sharing these stories, I'm documenting them, putting them in our newsletter, but it gets a chance for students with each other to share what they're doing outside of school, how they connect with their families.

But then also when families see their story workshop stories, they get a chance to understand, oh, that's great. My student is sharing this at school. Let's work more on that story at home. So one part of Story Workshop too is that when we're using inventive spelling, when we're sounding out those words, we always send our documentation of our stories home so we have families get a chance to hear that story and add on. I think that add-on piece is a huge access point for families at home too because it's a very simple way to start your literacy at home. Adding onto a story doesn't really require much except just listening and helping your students sound out those words. And I find that's a huge touch point for a lot of families because they enjoy, it's just beyond that reading aspect. They really enjoy sharing a story with their student.

And then for direct phonics instruction, we have our morning message in our morning meeting. It's a very important part of kindergarten where we get a chance to share with each other in the morning and just greet one another. But in our morning message we're having students read a greeting and usually I pose a question about how was your weekend? Or what is your favorite song? Or how do you, what's a calm space in your home that you'd like to share about? And in those moments, we have a chance for students obviously to read that morning message, but then connect with what they know, their language and what they're doing outside of school as well. And in all of that, I'm always welcoming in families throughout the day if they have that capacity to come in, help out and see what's going on. But ultimately, when we send home those weekly newsletters, the documentation, and come home with

our stories from Story Workshop, the joy that I see when families get to share about, oh, I heard this fabulous story that my student brought home and I'm excited to add on or share it back with you.

It brings me joy, but it also shows me that I'm creating a space in the classroom that's welcoming and a chance for families to interact in our literacy in their own way. Those are a few different ways that I try to put relationship at the forefront in my literacy throughout the year. And there's always chances to grow throughout the year as well.

Angelica Cruz: All right, thank you so much everyone. What a wonderful wealth of ideas for how to authentically engage families and caregivers in literacy learning. It's always so great to hear from folks in the field as to what they're doing every day. On this slide, we've summarized three key takeaways that we hope you all gained from our webinar today. The first is that collaboration with families and caregivers as learning partners is vital for student literacy development at school. The second is that productive collaboration with families and caregivers is based on recognizing, valuing, really honoring and supporting home and community language and literacy assets and practices. And the third is that it is just so important to engage our families and caregivers as partners in the learning and as decision makers in their children's literacy experiences. Because we have a little bit of time, feel free to add any other takeaways that you gained from this webinar into the chat as we close out today. And I'd also like to invite folks to add any other ideas you have for authentically engaging families around literacy learning, or if there's anything you heard today that you want to go try out in your school or classroom community, please add that into the chat now.

And then we will move on to our last slide here with a quick acknowledgement and thank you. Wonderful. So thank you again everyone for joining us today. We hope you found this webinar helpful. We do have one last request of everyone today. If you can please fill out this quick survey for us about the webinar. This will help us plan future webinars. I promise it's very short. It only has a few questions and it won't take much time, but it will be really helpful for us to tailor future professional learning experiences. There's a QR code there, you can just pull it right up on your phone or you can click on the link in the chat to access it. We've also included contact information here in case you have any additional questions regarding how to authentically engage families and caregivers in literacy learning in your schools and classrooms. Feel free to reach out about anything at all. Finally, a plug for our fall webinars. We will have two more webinars coming up after the summer break, and so stay tuned and keep an eye open for information on those webinars. All the information to register will be on our Oregon Instructional Frameworks website, which we can also put in the chat for you now. And thank you again so much everyone for joining us today.